

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, July 28. 1691.

Quest. 1. **I** Have long indulg'd my self in a restless Habit, which I now find contradictory to my Reason, and wou'd leave it. I'll not be particular, because the Answer may be of use to every Body, who are not without the Allurements of some Darling Sin? Query, What an Habit is, whether to be overcome, and what are the Methods in order to it?

Ans<sup>r</sup>. Some Authors have defin'd Habits by Acts, making no distinction, when to have is not an Action, but the mode of action. The Schoolmen have defin'd an Habit to be, *That according to which we have our selves to something good or bad*; or to give a plainer definition according to others, 'tis a permanent form, or 'tis a Quality informing some new power. The two last are something Foreign, yet true; the first is full, the only difficulty lyes in the expression of *having our selves to something*, &c: where have only signifies a Freedom to use and enjoy the thing possessed when we will. Some Habits are to be lost, and some not: Such as are of the very Essence of Nature, (by which I mean the whole composition, Intellective and Sensitive) as to Act, Love, Fear, Hear, See, &c. are not to be divested till we lay by our Nature, but the Act of loving, hating, hearing, &c. may be alter'd both as to the measure and as to the Object, for such alteration is accidental, and in our own Choice; nor can our additional Constitutions absolutely byass our power in our determinations of them. To the first of these, that the Principles of Nature, such as were given in our Creation, as to desire, love, fear, eat, sleep, &c. are not to be remov'd, there's no body will dispute; but that super-induc'd Habits, or Customs may, whether good or bad, remains to be prov'd — In order whereunto we premise, *That an habit of either Vice or Vertue, is caus'd by a repetition of acting viciously or virtuously*: (lib. 2. Eth. c. 1. to 5.) But we need not bring in the Philosophers suffrage, since every one knows this to be truth. This granted, there was a time before these Acts were repeated, and by consequence a time before the first of these Acts began which constituted the habit. Now, when the first Temptation was offer'd, 'twas either in our power to withstand it, or out of our power; if out of our power, then we are forc'd upon't by a necessity of sinning, that God left us so, or else by our own irresistible weakness. Not the first, because God cannot be the Author of Sin, nor the last, because as yet we were not weakened by the habit of it: So that it follows, the first Act was in our own power. This prov'd, I shall further premise, that the General is of the same Nature with all the particulars of which 'tis constituted, or it cou'd be no General, made up of those particulars. As for Instance, An habit of suppose twenty repetitions, the last is constituted of the Nature and guilt of the preceding nineteen and it's self, and so downward till you come to the first, which as is prov'd, was once in your power to have withstood it; and if the first, the second must also be in your own power, because 'tis part of the first only your power something less, and weakened by guilt, yet not destroy'd, nor can ever absolutely be destroyed by repetitions, I mean morally, from the reason above, for I design not to enlarge how God in Justice reprobates some Persons, when they have arrived to such or such a Degree in Impiety. Only thus much I assert, that any Person let his habit in Vice be never so strong, if he is not given over to a judicially reprobate Mind, may by the assistance of Gods Grace, and a co-operating care proportionable to his danger, rectify and undo all his wicked Customs in vice. It holds so also in Vertue, wherein a habit is stronger in the last Act, than the preceding one, but yet of the same Nature, and so downward to the first, where we shall find our own power (for so we may call what is given us) effectually co-operating with the Grace of God, which we may resist (ordinarily,) for we are not forc'd into

good Actions more than into vicious ones, for that wou'd destroy rewards and punishments, from whence it also follows, that a Habit of Vertue may be lost, and the Grace of God extinguish'd in us, I mean Morally, or according to the Nature of Causes and Effects; for in this also I design not to search into the Decrees of God, and extraordinary Assistances of Grace, but the common Methods that God Almighty makes use of with his Creatures. I know several Instances of falling, away from habits of Vertue, and of reclaiming habits of Vice, which also is plainly suppos'd in Ezek. 18. 2 Pet. 2. 20, 21, 22. and several other Texts — There are only two Objections for an impossibility of leaving off habits in Vice and Vertue, the first is: *Can the Leopard change his Spots, and the Blackamore his Skin, then may ye also do good that are accus'd to do evil*; and the other is, *He that is born of God sinneth not, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God*: Both which places only show that 'tis a very unusual difficult matter to do it. The first of these places ought not to render us desperate, nor the last secure, for they express no more, than that generally it is so, but not always, as other Testimonies of Sacred Writ, and the frequent Instances we meet do evince the contrary.

Having shov'd what an habit is, and that it may be broke, it only remains to lay down the Method how: *An habit always has it's contrary, and may be broke by the use of those Methods which constitute it's contrary, or by removing the occasions by which 'tis encreas'd and continued*. As for instance, a Fire is extinguish'd by Water, or by not applying Fuel to feed it. But to come nearer the matter, and at the same time to answer several other Questions sent us about conquering such and such habits, and altering Constitutions, we say, That Ambition, Revenge, Passion, and all other Effects of Pride are the best overcome by practising Acts of Self-resignation and Subjection to the Divine Providence. One of the Ancient Philosophers us'd himself to beg Alms of Statues, and being ask'd the Reason, said he, *I am learning patience by denial*. A seeking of all opportunities of being deny'd, disappointed, abus'd and affronted, and at the same time resolving to bear it, quickly alters the Man, and roots out the above mentioned Effects of Pride; 'tis a Method God approves, and often makes use of when he reclaims such People by Sicknes, Afflictions, &c. Again, is the habit Drunkenness, Gluttony, Idleness, Whoring, or Uncleaness? The Cure is by practising the constitutive parts of Temperance and Chastity: But in these and such like Cases where the Flesh is concern'd, our Divines have well inculcated, that 'tis safer to flee than fight; not once to hear reasons of either side upon any suggestion, but to drive it out of your Mind, by going about some Business, or entering into Good Company, and when the Temptation is off, to fortifie your self by Reason, Prayer, and Resolution not to comply: Examples are of great use, read *Augustines Confessions*. I knew a Young Man who had habituated himself to Uncleaness for several Years, yet conquer'd it at last by this means. After his many Vows, Resolutions and Prayers, finding his weakness, he open'd his Case to his Friend, and made this Contract with him, (1.) *Never to hide the least Circumstance of his Temptation from him, but continually from time to time to give him an Impartial Account what ground he had got or lost in the Combate*. (2.) *To take such Measures as his Friend offer'd him, because the Temptation was suited to the Inclination and Temper of the Tempted, and not the other*: So that the Devil having now to deal with whose Inclinations were contrary, one of which was always ready to withstand him, he was at such a loss, that his Measures were broke, and his Captive manumitted. And so 'tis possible in all habits to get the Mastery: what more tyrannizing than the passion of Love, and yet how easily overcome by avoiding the occasions that bred it, as converse, or by representing



ing the ingratitude, weaknesses, &c. of the party belov'd. In short, get but a true inform'd Judgment, the Act of knowing things as they really are in their own Nature, and the business is almost done to your hands. As to Constitutions, they are of the same Nature as habits, and differ mostly in Name when they come to any perfection. And at the beginning we are more indebted to Nature for the first than the last, but that part of Nature it self may be spar'd, is evident, by Examples every day in the loss of Limbs, Eyes, &c. and yet after a little use the loss is little, and why it shou'd not be yet less, when 'tis our Interest, is a riddle to every understanding Man: how has a Fit of Sickness alter'd the passionate Fool, a Fit of the Stone reclaim'd the Intemperate, the Chains and Prison converted the Thief. And if these Alterations have been by afflicting the Sensitive Soul only, who can suppose the rational Soul, which is yet of a more noble powerful Nature, to be less susceptible of the Methods of regulation from Errors. To think is the prerogative of an Intellectual Being, and thinking is a comparing of Principles in order to some Conclusion, Conclusions are demonstrative, and oblige the Understanding, the understanding moves the Will, and the Will commands Action agreeable to thought. Hence to be Master of ones Self and habits, 'tis indispensibly necessary that our thoughts be good and regular, which is effected by good Converse either with Books or Persons. Hence we may know our selves, and adapt particular Remedies to our weaknesses, for there's nothing impossible that is necessary to the accomplishment of our happiness.

Quest. 2. A Malefactor was executed at Tyburn, and eight hours after was by a Statuist put into a Mold, when taken out they perceived a prominence in the middle of the Mould, caus'd by a full Erection of the penis of the dead Felton, and within the hollow part as considerable a quantity of digested blood as is supposed sufficient for Generation. Query, What could cause the Erection and Emission mentioned?

Ans. We meet with several Instances of Erection after Death: In answer to the present one, we say, That some Corps retain heat for a longer time than can be conceived, and revive tho' exposed in deep frosty weather. Vessalius that famous Anatomist attempted to dissect the dead Body of a Grandee who rose at the cut of a Knife, and many have revived after Suspension or Hanging. But admitting this Corps Exanimated, the reason of this Erection might be thus: The Weather being hot, and the Circulation of the Blood suppress'd by the Suspension of the Body not actually cold, the natural heat that remain'd in the Blood, and the intercepted status in the Vessels was by the Circumambient cold Plaister of Paris compressed, driven or compelled to make that part turgid, and to take it's course where mechanically it cou'd find vent. Nothing being so common as the Belly tumifying and purging after the Exinction of Vitality, which to prevent, some Cold thing is usually applyed only to the Belly, whereas it was all over embalm'd with the Plaister of Paris *ut supra*.

Quest. 3. What is Knight-Errantry?

Ans. Knight-Errantry is Loving, fighting, whining, rambling, starving, tilting, fighting, dying, reviving, waking, staring, singing, crying, praying, wishing, composing, writing, serenading, rhyming, hoping, fearing, despairing, raving.

Quest. 4. What place doth the Sun set in, and where doth it rise?

Ans. All the World over.

Quest. 5. How does a Spider poison a Fly?

Ans. It has been observ'd, that when a large Fly is intangled, the Spider dares not come so near to her as to a small one, but stands at some little distance, and uses a sort of a Shoving Motion with the head forward and backward, as School-boys do when they spit at one another: So that 'tis concluded they emit their poison either by spitting or by breathing, for the Fly has quickly done struggling when they begin to use that shoving sort of Motion.

Quest. 6. What are we to think of a Vacuum?

Ans. We have already said something of it in Vol. 1 Numb. 4. Qu. 8. We add, that 'tis impossible such a thing shou'd be. If there be a Vacuum, it must have some Cause not from God, because Self-Entity cannot

produce Non-entity, no more than cold can by it's own power produce Fire: Nor can it be produced by what is not, because there can be no production without Action, nor any Action from what is not, Action necessarily supposing something to act; nor cou'd it produce it self, for then it would act, which is equally absurd. Besides, the Schoolmen say, that a Vacuum is not only a Negation, but a privation, that is, a space capable of a Body without the Body. So that at first sight the Impossibility of such a thing appears both before and after the Creation of the World: As we have prov'd there is none now, so that there was none before, is evident from this, a Vacuum supposes a Circumscribability of matter, but there was neither Matter nor Form before they were created, therefore no Vacuum.

✪ We have received several Letters, some of 'em from no mean Persons, concerning the answering that important Question, *Whether the present offers as a Reformation are like to prove effectual?* Which has enforced us to delay our Answer till next Tuesday, that a matter of so great moment mayn't want its due consideration. At which time we shall also endeavour to shew the Nature, and take off the Calumny of the word *Informers*, where Vertue and a well guided Conscience are the Motive. As also to give our Answer about putting off ill Money.

✪ We have received a Letter from a Gentleman, wherein he desires to know whether it be convenient to insert in our answer to it an Account of his late six Nights Rambles, with the Confessions he has got from those Creatures about their first Engagements, their struggles with Conscience, and the Methods of their stifling it by their Habits in Lewdness: Wherefore we advise the Gentleman, if he pleases, to send 'em speedily, and they shall be inserted in our next Tuesdays Mercury.

\* \* Those many Nice and Curious Questions which are now going to the Press make up our Second Volume Numb. 30. besides the Preface and Index, and therefore we have now (according to our old method) begun this Paper Numb. 1. Vol. 3. — As soon as ever our Second Volume is finish'd, there will be publick Notice given.

✪ The Gentleman that sent us the Question about Duelling, (which shall be answer'd next Saturday) sent several others, which by a mischance were lost, but if he sends the same again, they shall be all answer'd at the end of our Second Volume.

## Advertisement.

✪ WE having long since promised a Supplement to each Volume of our *Athenian Mercury*, that shall not only contain the design and scope of the most remarkable Books printed in England, but also a Translation of what's most rare and valuable in the *Universal Historical Bibliothèque*, the *Paris Journal des Sçavans*, the *Alta Eruditionum Lipsiæ*, the *Giornali de Letterati*, the *Physical Journal*, the *Histoire des ouvrages des Sçavans*, &c. as also a Translation of other ingenious pieces transmitted to us from foreign parts, (all which are enter'd in the Hall-book;) we say again having promis'd all this to the World, we hope our Readers will not measure the Design by our First Essay, which is less compleat than we intended it at first; because being taken up on a sudden, it was not possible to get in what help we desired, and some Papers that were necessary to the Perfection of it. But we have now the Assistance of several Learned Persons, well vers'd in all Foreign Languages, to carry on the Work, and shall have all new Pieces as soon as ever publish'd: So that nothing shall pass in Europe worthy the Consideration of the Learned World, that shall not be met with in our Translations; and what is at any time wanting in one Supplement, shall be added in the next.

— We design to add the Contents of each Supplement to that Alphabetical Table we have promis'd at the end of every Year, that by the help of this General Table our Querists may presently find any Question or Subject they have a mind to consult, either in our Weekly Mercuries, or Supplemental Volumes: And therefore to render our Undertaking thus servicable to the Reader, we shall (at the request of several Gentlemen who tell us they'll buy these Translations in no other Volume but what will bind up with our Weekly Mercuries) Print the Supplement to each Volume of our *Athenian Gazette* on the same Paper with our Weekly Mercuries, that so they may bind up with them.